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# Glory of Life



GLORY  
*of*  
LIFE

LLEWELYN POWYS

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD  
LONDON

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*Dedicated to Gamel Woolsey*



## Note

*Glory of Life* was written in a cornfield on the Dorset Downs under a cloudless sky and in full view of the English Channel. In the year nineteen hundred and thirty-four it was published by The Golden Cockerel Press with wood engravings by Robert Gibbings. This especial edition numbered two hundred and seventy-seven copies. The price of the book was three guineas. The edition is now sold out.



# Glory of Life



I REMEMBER SEEING ON THE GATE OF A FRENCH CATHEDRAL a tract with a drawing representing the earth revolving in space, surrounded by clouds. Below the picture was a rough calculation as to the number of people still to be saved by the Catholic faith. I have forgotten the exact figure given, but it was clear that the believers were scanty compared with the infidel population. The paper was suggestive. There was evoked an impressive vision of the hungry rout of men and women, of living men and living women in every continent, eating, drinking, and looking up at the stars with bewildered minds.

It is extraordinary how obsessed human beings have always been with the idea of God. Confronted by the unknown, by the unpredictable turns of their individual fates, they have tenaciously held to this primitive hypothesis. Our palaeolithic ancestors, squatting in bramble patches, or lying recumbent like 'bristly boars' upon beds of bracken and dry grass, soon enough invented this simple and fallacious metaphysic. They carved gods on trees and on stones and went piping down the valleys in religious troops. Belief in the Gods was man's first intellectual deduction before the incomprehensible. It offered him a work-a-day explanation for the mystery of life, and at the same time left him free to follow his practical designs without misgivings. To appease, to placate

these lively unseen beings was his purpose, and when this had been done, to follow his heart's desire. It was the professional priests who first thought of associating these invisible powers, potent to do mischief, with the disciplines of the social contract, of associating morality with religion; and they have successfully managed to graft these profitable misconceptions upon the uneasy generations.

We in the western world are now very nearly disabused of the subtle illusion. The twilight of the Gods is upon us. Its strange ecliptic light is spreading far and wide over the mountains, over the valleys, and over the lighted cities of the plains. We know better than our fathers and are not to be so easily gulled, either by the creaking of a chamber door, or by thunder out of the heavens. Men of science have examined the substance of matter with insect-like precision, and so sharply have the theologians been put to their shifts that the slightest imagined irregularity in the ordinances of natural law is welcomed by them with eagerness as offering suitable mushroom soil for the Gods to grow upon. The random fringe of subatomic reality answers their purpose. In those regions where man's faculties of sense-perception begin to falter, up jumps God. 'Where you least look for it there starts the hare.' Any delay in the rational explanation of physical phenomena and we begin to hear talk of the divine. Where the trees in the groves



grow thickest, where the caves of Mithras are darkest, where the folds of the temple curtains fall most heavily, we are sure very soon to hear rumours of an august presence.

It is clear as day that the affairs of this world are not under the direction of an intelligent and sensitive deity. An hour's observation of any single acre of the world's surface would be sufficient to convince an unbiassed intelligence of this. The ordinary world that we look upon is held tight in the clutch of calculable laws such as hold the girders of bridges together, or make possible a foreknowledge of the movements of comets. Against this banded background, circumstances arise from what appears to be the clash of animate wills, but these circumstances are subject to confusion from occasional down-dartings of the howlet Chance. The fact is, every one of us, clergy, scholars, and philosophers, are caged like goldfinches to the destined perches of our cultural education. The preconceptions we have inherited are not easy to exchange. We pass through life in a kind of trance, hypnotised by the past, imprisoned in present day illusions. Any form of intellectual detachment is very difficult for us. We lack that clear insight that belongs to slaves who have lost all. We are too involved not to care, and to care is to be betrayed. When I was in Jerusalem I discovered that the Arabs had invented a pretty play of words about the Church of

the Holy Sepulchre. They called it the place where the ass lay down and rolled. These fellows, in their long robes smelling of camel's milk, can be sufficiently objective about matters that do not concern them, but let any of us jibe or jape at their hotspur prophet and there would be a fine clutter. All the world over it is the same, in the universities, in the market-places, no difference whatever. Human beings seem utterly incapable of letting go, of forgetting their prejudices and predilections, of giving their intellects complete emancipation, of allowing them to float away uncommitted to any kind of persuasion, subversive, dispassionate, amoral, free.

Yet it is just this easygoing, unorthodox attitude that will hasten the coming of a true civilization. As soon as the majority of people are willing to commit their personal desires, mental, spiritual, and material, to attested judgements, whether or not opposed to their interests, there will be a return of the Golden Age. Every good citizen should be under an obligation to drive his mind out into the void so that it can roam backwards and forwards in homeless liberty. In Switzerland the cattle have to be driven out of their steaming stables with sticks in the spring, and after the same manner it is in the nature of the human mind to hold with sulkysedulity to its congenital sloth.

Without doubt, the politic attitude to religion is

the drastic one. There should be a Pack Monday assembling of all the Gods that have ever pestered and perplexed the human imagination. The Almighty, with his architectural foot-and-yard-rules, should lead the way, and behind him, in carnival fashion, should trail the whole motley band, Marduk, Moloch, Baal, Horus, Osiris, and Isis, Apollo, Dionysus, and Jesus even, that great poet, human, romantic, and compassionate. They would all have to march off with their sanctified symbols over their shoulders. None would be overlooked. They would every one of them be rounded up, the great Gods, the lesser Gods, and the demi-Gods without distinction; even the little dethroned abject Gods would have to go. It would be an Earth Reformation, and what a sigh of relief would rise up from the sons of men as they watched these immortals disappear round the corner of the wayside hedge, the crooked aitch-bone of some hideous African deity still for a moment visible as he bowed himself forward to accelerate his pace!

**B**ECAUSE THE GODS ARE VANISHING, BECAUSE IT is now no longer possible to believe that earthly affairs are subject to an arbitrary supernatural interference, it by no means follows that religion is dead. The deepest religious mood is

a religious mood that in no way depends upon belief in a God. The highest form of faith is a Godless faith. We have pretended long enough. We must allow our spirits to sink like stones to the bottom of the pond. Mud is a more honest and dependable substance than is air or water. The true religion is the religion of the atheist. By day and by night men and women who belong to this ancient foundation cast themselves as low as the very grass in passionate worship. They are sustained by no sense of benevolent wardship. No eye sees them, no ear hears them. There is none to shepherd their wayfaring, yet their outcast spirits never cease from acclaiming what is. Merely to be alive, to be abroad upon the earth, is justification enough.

It is a great folly to put confidence in the visionary assurances reputed to come to us out of eternity. We, in our childlike egoism, make large deductions from certain experiences we judge to be mystical, translating them into revelations for our own advantage. We declare that in these moments we become part of some great metaphysical reality, part of eternity, part of God, and forthwith share with him his attribute of eternal life. No reasoning could be more unsure. On such occasions of heightened awareness we are conscious of the mighty flux of matter, and that is all. We are like ephemeral minnows who

have been given an opportunity to observe the rushing volume of an autumn flood sweep over them and a moment later are snapped up by jack-pike. Because once or twice in our lifetime we experience sensations of awe, because once or twice we have wit enough to escape the exigencies of our trivial tea-party lives, this is no gospel of elevation from our mortal estate. In the piled-up squalor of the crypts of death such wish-fulfilments count as nothing. They fade away, vanish, and are for ever cancelled.

It is most sure that when we are dead, we are dead. When our heart has given its last beat, when we have taken our last breath, then all is at quits. If this were not the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, we would most certainly be able to find some reliable evidence to the contrary. There is no such evidence worthy of the consideration of a wise man, and there never has been. How can we put the tittle-tattle of parlour spiritualism against the verdict of the ancient centuries? A dead man has never been known to rise from the grave. Observe a seaside crowd, so frivolous, so sense-obsessed, and ponder upon the prodigious credulity that could claim for each gnat-cheap soul a permanent survival. If any man could snatch a glimpse into the coopered barrel of his own restricted personality he would realize the absurdity of such a supposition in a flash. Every summer it is

possible to hear the grasshoppers in their green jackets chirruping 'we are immortal, we are immortal'. Soon are their dry-grass chanties put to an end by the chill of winter.

When I listen to the folly uttered by the clergy, when I observe the petty limitations of their minds, so unfit for any form of severe thought, I am amazed that their sentimental fables have persisted so long. The doctrine of personal immortality is a palpable gloss preserved throughout the generations by human egoism and by the injuries done to the heart of man by death. In the larger cemeteries of Paris the graveyard proprietors stipulate for the right to remove tombstones after five years. They know well how short a space of time is required for the healing of a broken life. A graveyard shovel preaches homilies every day to the confusion of the idealists. Always these comforted theologians, when they give expression to such easy fancies, are thinking of themselves and of their friends conspicuously present in the space-time mousetrap of their particular parishes. They do not encourage our minds to range back over the past, to contemplate the graveyards of antiquity, the graveyards of the Mohammedan world with their light-figured stones, the forest graveyards of Ethiopia, the dust of the unnumbered dead in Asia. Who now gives a thought to any spirit-life of his great-grandparents?

And yet their names have only been recently inscribed upon the long roll-call of the dead. Who cares a fig for the spirit-life of other peoples' great-grandparents; for the spirit-life of the great-grandparents of the little shaveling cobbler's apprentice who this morning, basket on arm, went whistling down a side street of Birmingham? It is impossible to consider these matters objectively. We all are subject to the sensitive credulity of an afternoon-of-the-funeral psychology. On no question is the human mind more illogical, more cloudy, more under the domination of herd hallucinations.

It is argued that the very universality of belief in life after death offers a kind of evidence for its truth. Subterfuge below subterfuge. Men can be shown the deep well of oblivion, but not one wishes to drink of it. They will jerk away, creep off on tender feet like sneak-thieves, be anything, do anything, say anything before they will face the fact of a doom that has been apparent to every honest mind since the world began. Matter, with its transformations and transmutations, has a way of disintegrating, sliding back, letting all go in a forlorn precipitation, in a slippery disastrous subsidence. Each year children are buried, chilled to death for no reason at all, by a chance rain storm, by a draught from a kitchen door. The blow is a blind one. It is a stroke raw and heartless, and the mother

raises her head with the hoarse moan of a cow moose when the hunter's knife is pressing its way to the heart. A clamour of fright troubles the village, just as rooks are troubled in their high-swaying attics by a gun-shot; then surely and inevitably the event is assimilated into the group memory, and in fifty years is utterly forgotten; and all is as though it never happened. Everywhere there are new joys for newly born children, new sorrows for the aged; and the earth smelling the same over the forgotten child's grave, and the dandelions showing early there; and life still wide outspread before the eager passions of men and women.

**A**LIVE IN A GODLESS UNIVERSE, AND WITH OUR minds unfalsified by enervating beliefs, how can we still be religious? Nothing is more natural. Religious emotion has from the first been erroneously associated with feelings of personal security. It is more sincere and more honourable when under no suspicion of gain. The natural worship is the detached worship of animal life, of bird life, of fish life. It is the worship of the belted stallion making the farmyard echo with his nostril voice; it is the worship of the wheatear advancing along a cart rut with flashing intermittent flights; it is the worship of the lubberly chub, proud of being a chub at the bot-



tom of the river Yeo. It belongs to the glory of life, to the unuttered sense of glory in the chance of existence, in the chance that called us up out of the dead dust to mirror for a period with glassy retinas the mysteries of matter. An adoration of life is our religion. It is a worship of the moment's duration, inviolate, detached, and passionate.

At the hour when the foxes are stirring out of their holes, if we stand on the edge of a high chalk cliff overlooking the sea, all is made clear. The rounded form of the earth is outlined against infinity and feathered grasses are waving free against the tattered banners of the masterless clouds.

The vision before us is God-empty, God-void. The excited spirit trembles with regenerate exultation. All is prepared for the celebration of an unhallowed mass. Far below ancient world-waves break upon the congregated pebbles, break and surge back as they have done without cessation from the earliest ages. All the aeons of geology are in the sound of this recurrent sea-muttering, all that has been and will be. From one end to the other of the winding edges of the continents, day after day, month after month, century after century, millennium after millennium, this resonance has been familiar to the ears of man. It tells of time that is no time, of time that is itself a kind of absolute isolate, like the lonely suspended life-breathing

of a patch of samphire, silent, moon-illuminated, on an unnoticed ledge. What fond discontent has taken possession of our hearts that we must always be hankering after affirmations of a spiritual custody? We sons of Belial ask too much. Is it not enough to have glimpsed a panoramic illusion of the material universe in all its perfection without thus idling after eternal participations? It is foolish as well as unseemly to be so grasping. The damp white cliffs above the deserted sea-washed beaches are set with small images, images of satanic saints, each in its Parian niche. They are cormorants roosting, cormorants dozing in the twilight, cormorants dreaming of diving feats through dark waters in the wake of white flickering fish. The earnest night is fast closing in upon the forlorn beautiful landscape, and flying gulls are scattered far and wide over the dim sky. They float backwards and forwards as uncertainly as the large goose-feather flakes of a snow flurry. High above the wave-resisting shingle, above the dreaming sea-fowl, above the shoulders of the eternal hills, in a clear dizzy ether under haggard storm clouds these birds call to each other in the dolorous tones of their lost language. In the piercing apex of time, lightly suspended between the past and the future, they are consecrated with actual life. It is their hour. Like Pentecostal birds of a new schism they initiate a desperate truth. Consider

for a moment the mystery implicit in this flock of culvers from the cotes of the curfew earth. These buoyant, wide-winged, corporeal aggregates of quick atoms were not in existence a decade ago. The creative unresting energy of godless nature has, with daedalus craft, gathered the dust of the sullen earth into these volatile forms expressed to carry into the air hungry intestines lightly as leaves in the autumn. Where are now the gulls I listened to on these same cliffs as a boy? What rigorous displacement has dispersed those web feet, those feathers, those beaks of horn? They have been drawn back into the secret residua of matter, and from other egg artifacts on dusty precipitous platforms bright with sea sunshine other birds have risen.

· As it is with the turbulent herring gulls so it is with mortals. Our ten prehensile toes, though we conceal them so carefully, serve as sure tokens of our lowly origin, and should temper our presumptions. We are not born to be immortal, and we must accommodate ourselves to this fact attested both by sense and by reason. We believe in no God, that there is none to save outside the matrix of matter, that at our death the mind is utterly extinguished as is the flame of a farthing dip. Yet as long as the mind still flickers with recurrent apprehensions our delighted spirit can send out heathen prayers of gratitude for having seen sunlight upon corn.

I write in the month of September, and this morning when I awoke in an uncultivated corner of a barley field, the curse of the use-and-wont habit under which we mortals grovel was completely lifted from my head. Yesterday's storm from the west had but heralded a goose-summer. The morning sun, coming up over the thorn hedge, revealed the fact that the docks and thistles and wet grasses were all of them festooned with shining webs. On this particular morning hosts of spiders had appeared suddenly, like an invasion of insect Assyrians. All through the slow midnight hours their practical cohorts had been setting out nets with malicious intent, with the most precise engineering foreknowledge suspending a thread here and a thread there, until, with perfect mathematical symmetry, their fans of death were presented immaculate to the glittering dawn. Every year these crafty buck-spiders, these crafty bitch-spiders, transform all England's grassy acres into such faery fair-fields for no other purpose than to suck the blood of the unwitting flies that fall enmeshed in their dew-dainty traps. They do it overnight, and we are alive in the morning to witness the result of this wicked application, of this quaint and startling demonstration of the same high vitality that teaches the caterpillar to move along its one selected green stalk, and brings suddenly into existence smooth white

mushrooms in a morning meadow, as cool and lovely as the protruding breasts of little nursery girls.

THERE SHOULD BE NO LIMIT TO THE ALOOFNESS of a sincere and honourable spirit from the sanctimonious idealism of his neighbours. He must be bold to weave a bower of 'endless night' upon the very edge of the abyss of abysses. This precarious cat's-cradle he must make his intellectual habitation. It is not only belief in God that must be abandoned, not only all hope of life after death, but also all trust in an ordained moral order. It is as plain as the sun that existence as we know it can be under the supervision of no scrupulous deity. It is plain that no evidence worth a rush has ever been brought forward in proof of the immortality of the soul. The absence of moral order unconnected with human manners is certain. We must be prepared to take our bearings without a compass and with the slippery deck of our life-vessel sliding away from under our feet. Dogmatic nihilists, profoundly sceptical of all good, we are put to our resources like shipwrecked seamen. We have no sense of direction, and recognize without dispute that beyond the margin of our own scant moment all is lost. We acknowledge that nature moves ignorant of this babbling of good and evil. Such

discriminations are not understood by her. Good takes place and its beneficent results are swallowed up by time and death. Evil takes place and its malevolent results are swallowed up by time and death. The most ugly deeds and the most heroic deeds, both equally discounted by the whirlwind scattering of the atoms. In leafy hidden haunts, where, in soft summer, human emotions have bitten at the air with fanged teeth, sodden leaves will lie in autumn weather as though nothing had happened. ✓

Morality has its modest unsupernatural origin in the pressure of gregarious opinion. Lucretius grasped this fact. Every conduct-code of the nations is man-made and can have no further appeal. The nature of things is callous and froward and goes upon its way regardless. The lion with exultant ferocity stands over the fallen gazelle, and sated at last with innocent blood moves off to sleep, its mighty spirit at peace. The cat snoops by the stable door with sinister patience to catch the nestling swallow when first it tries to fly. With pride it lays the bird's broken feathers on the door-mat. The fledgling has been destroyed. In the vegetable world, in the animal world, in the fish world, in the insect world, what we regard as iniquity proceeds without impediment. There is no condemnation from the clouds. Millions upon millions of men go to an untimely death in an envious war. In

a hundred years all is equalized, the soldiers and the men of peace all dead, corporal and burgomaster scarce an elbow length apart in the dull earth, while above their hidden-away rotting bones in gallant sunshine renewed dramas develop.

For the very reason that the pageant of life is moving through an utterly indifferent dream-dimension sensitive spirits should be more inclined to prize civil values. This war against evil is a mere matter of taste and magnanimity. What is evil? Evil is cruelty. There is no other evil. All the commandments devised by man for the regulation of society do not concern us. Cruelty only is wickedness. To cause suffering, physical or mental, with witty intent, is the only unpardonable sin.

We must expect to do little in this contest. It is a fight between the tailors and the giants. Malfeasance is ubiquitous and unvanquishable; merely to breathe is to destroy. We must copy the Christians and walk by faith. There is no rational excuse for altruism. Confronted by the rat's head of cruelty in any of its disguises we must be as subtle as so many Machiavellis, as brave as the Martyrs, and if any ask the reason for our uncorrupted loyalty it is best to essay no answer.

It is sexual and mother love that has with the passing of the generations prompted men and women to refined responses, and it is just here that man's yard-

long staked-out claim of freedom allows him to sophisticate the mandates of nature. It would be base not to forward the cause of such an unforeseen chivalry. As this magnanimous sensibility grows more and more common so will the happiness of mankind prosper. Compassion under the discipline of scientific knowledge may well inaugurate the long looked-for Utopia. We have no illusions about working in God's vineyard. When we act with generosity we do it as a spreading oak innocent of virtue shelters sheep from the sun, carelessly, naturally, out of the abundance of our pagan vigour. This largess outpouring of a strong soul cannot be curtailed. It is the natural property of a temperament richly fulfilled. It has certainly nothing whatever to do with religion, logic, or philosophy.

THE CRY OF CONVENTIONAL PEOPLE ALWAYS HAS been that if belief in God goes, and belief in morality goes, then all society will be confounded. Victims of their own unrecognized suppressions, of their own instinctive avarice, they conclude that intellectual emancipation would immediately result in a dangerous licence. Nothing is further from the truth. Freedom from the prejudices of their period has always been the privilege of civi-



lized people. It would be a hard matter to estimate the petty persecutions that result directly from provincialism, from that unfortunate state of having settled opinions upon unsettled matters. Any examination of life shows the large amount of unnecessary suffering that results from emotional bigotry. 'Leave all free as I have left all free.' Wherever this excellent advice of Walt Whitman is understood properly men and women become tolerant of the manifold twists and turns that nature creates. Any wide view of social relationships must be founded upon an unyielding scepticism.

People's attitude to national and international politics offers a supreme example of the power of stupidity and fanaticism to obstruct human welfare. With receptive disillusioned minds open to suggestion it would not be difficult to solve the worst of our problems. The reign of universal happiness is indefinitely postponed because of endless ape-like preconceptions that will only disappear when belief in static human-made fables has been replaced by a steadfast conviction that all is shifting and the human drama is to be judged as taking place on an island precariously floating upon a Sargasso sea that has no bottom. It is absurd to predict that any wide absolution from conventional notions would forthwith start an epoch of riot. The exact opposite would occur. As

soon as the majority of human minds had become truly accessible to ideas of every sort ample scope for amendment would arise. Civilization does not depend upon dogmas which are and always have been the weapons of tyranny. Inspiration grows best on unfenced soil. The populations at the present day are wretched not because they have too much freedom, but because they have not freedom enough. The true purpose of life has been perverted. The false values imposed on us are the products of mistakes caused by the high premium put upon personal property. A man's life-capital is invested in his body. All his life's happiness comes from his body. To be successful in life does not consist in acquiring external possessions, but in the free healthy life of the senses. Such a persuasion in no way presupposes a reluctance on our part to bear our legitimate share in the pismire provisioning of society. We are as good candidates of citizenship as any, are as diligent to drag back to our citadel our wayside victuals. We are more malleable to suggestion, more amenable to disciplines than are the others for the reason that our kingdom of heaven does not depend upon the emptier meeds of life. It is a thing to marvel at in our industrial epoch how men and women have been defrauded of their birthright. They age before their time, their faces are pinched, anxious, and ignoble because, partly out of necessity, partly out of stupidity, they neglect plans for personal

happiness, for secret moments of bodily refreshment, of bodily rapture, for secret moments of spiritual contemplative ecstasy.

In the great cities I have visited, in London, in Chicago, in Vienna, in San Francisco, in Durban, in Athens, I have been amazed to observe these dead souls, toilers both rich and poor, submitting to an outrageous subjugation without protest. The sun's heat, the frost's cold, the falling of magical silver rains cannot rouse them from their slumber; while awake they snore. They are somnambulists hypnotized by human lies to take the dreary allotment of their destiny for granted. If for once they could envisage life as it really is in all its wayward variety, if for once they could appreciate in a single illumination the hazard of their momentary consciousness poised upon nothing, upon a creative outlawed energy, a passion for life its sole terrible purpose, then perhaps suddenly would come a new conversion.

IF THESE EXPLOITED PEOPLE COULD EVER GET A GLIMPSE of the essential terms of their earth existence, if they ever truly apprehended how death each day growls at life, they would realize with searing knowledge the import of gathering in the rich harvest of their own signal experience. For each soul born, as the Christians teach, is of inestimable value to itself,

as it wings its way alone, alone, alone, within the circumference of 'the world's flaming ramparts'. Advantage in life in no way depends upon winning the applause of worldly people. This should be taught in every elementary school. A man may very well die as a tramp in a ditch, with grey hair against blackening winter nettles, and yet have lived to greater purpose than the prosperous haberdasher in the neighbouring market town. It is always a man's response to life that counts, his power of receiving with animation those messages of cognizance carried to him by his rabble senses.

What reward has the worldling to show when he lies at last in his coffin? He has gone through life as one blind, deaf, and dumb. He has squandered his days, sold the pearl of his destiny for a sow's-ear purse. Our unhallowed religion is free to all. Its proselytes do not have to be rich or clever. It fits the clown equally with the scholar. Consider the people who are each day restless to attend social gatherings, whose deepest life-satisfaction is derived from a smoothsupercilious adaptability to a fashionable tone, and how hollow in the end seems this method of egoistic display. Far better to be a cockroach scouting for crumbs in a lampless kitchen, 'a buttery sprite at war with crickets'. I refer to these social gatherings because I have found that they invariably reinforce my

philosophy, whether they be fashionable or unfashionable, formal or riotous. Oh! what a liberation to escape, to be out once more under the night clouds, to feel the houseless wind against my forehead, the far-travelled wind confederate with our doom.

. Of course the most vital aspect of the fulfilment of a man's or of a woman's natural life has to do with sex. How continually one hears people say, 'You make too much of sex. It does not play as important a part in people's lives as you suppose'. It is the backbone of all life, the pliable, beautiful, spiked backbone upon which the fair grace of the flesh is built. Except in its sadistic manifestations and where children are involved, we unhallowed religious should protect and champion it, forwarding the cause of lovers in season and out of season, natural or unnatural, licit or illicit. Nothing is more villainous than the way people of conventional habits endeavour to tame, correct, and inhibit the wild splendour of Lust. Lust is nature's free gift to us all, and the hours of its consummation are beyond all measure the most real and ecstatic hours of our life. 'The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.' Whenever mutual attraction exists between two people it is a life-disavowal to reluct from joy. A man's manner of approach to this sweet fountain, to this faery fern-shadowed pool, must depend upon his own disposition and upon his destiny. It is a personal

matter and should, under heaven, have nothing whatever to do with other people, with one's family or with society. Mutual desire is its own justification at all times and in all places, and if our neighbours prove sulky, or our mother or our father, or husband or wife, or sister or brother, or mistress or guardian, they must be deceived from cockcrow to cockcrow. Are there no feathers in the world to oil locks with, no back pantry door-keys, no hayricks, raspberry canes, apple lofts?

Renan wrote, 'Nature thinks nothing of chastity'. This is true enough, but in so far as we surpass nature chastity may, for some people, have a kind of value. I would say nevertheless without hesitation that far more persons are injured by sexual restraints than by sexual indulgence. Oh what slow malign torturings of the human spirit are being done about us in the name of this most foolish human illusion!

In life everything is so involved, and every relationship so entirely unique, that to abide by any fixed rule is impossible. I myself believe that it shows the most sorry improvidence to turn aside from such felicities when opportunity offers. These moments are our golden moments and the moments that on the day of our death we are likely to value most.

WHEN, AS OCCASIONALLY HAPPENS, THERE IS an utter, impassioned, and heroical love between two people, when the thought of each other's bodies causes them day and night to stand as worshippers before the shrine of Aphrodite, quivering, shivering with idolatry, fidelity becomes as natural as to breathe. Who would wish for further content when he has found the true grail, when with his living eyes he can see the divine life-spear stand straight and firm between the lips of the sacrosanct life-cup? When love of this kind visits the earth, as it does visit the earth rarely and by chance, then preserve it, shelter it, sacrifice everything to it! The festival is daily spread. You are of all mortals the most favoured. Your hands are full of corn; let the scant grass seeds go. Nothing can better fortify the raging soul against the hazards of its flight through the incalculable curvatures of time than such an adoration. To know that you will be loved, even to the grave's edge, deprives the Icarus-like falling from life to death of half its horror. For there are moments in the lives of every man and of every woman when cold airs blow up out of the charnel-house of matter and an intellectual spirit is suddenly surprised, in spite of religion, in spite of philosophy, by hare-brained frights. Then it is that there passes through the goose flesh of the ranging corporeal image a sleet-chill, carnal shiver,

and the true strength of an individual's genius is tested, for there is required from each of us a self-control, a spiritual austerity, an unyielding stoicism, a defiant gallantry.

It is wise, while our faculties are still eager, while our earth-lust remains still unquenched, to edge our minds forward, finger-inch by finger-inch, towards the desperate truth. It is best to accustom ourselves to the disastrous reality, and then, the worst being known, to turn back to life, to the years, to the days that remain to us, with unregenerate allegiance. For our sun-encircling ding-dong planet encloses a dream garden which lacks for nothing. There are painted flowers standing bright in the sunshine. There are moonlight copses and monolith glades. There are girls incarnate with bodies washed in dew and smelling of white clover. There are grottoes and shadowed places oracular and awful, and everywhere guileless presentations of the simple traditions of human life, a clutch of goose's eggs, blackberries in a basket!

It would sometimes seem that there would be reward enough in merely observing the unconscious movements of those we love, the familiar movements of a body, fond fingers held nervously against the temples, against the moulded engines of the ghastly brain! Because life is thick with beauty and mystery we must not forthwith conclude that our interest in



it is more than a leasehold interest. We must approach life with firm unfaltering minds, with chivalrous minds well disciplined to ask and to expect no more than what has been clearly given to us. With our heads packed with wise Sancho Panza saws we must jög to the grave as best we may. For enough and more than enough has already been allowed us. From the days when our blind lips draw nourishment from our mothers' paps till that grievous hour when our fate is upon us we have experience of an existence intricate and profound. There is a wide difference between gross death and subtle life.

Apart from the multifarious marvels of nature's creation—rubies and opals embedded in eternal hills; birds dancing through the air, now above our chimney-pots, now traversing with lifted flights the aerial spaces between august stationary trees—there is sufficient poetry for an age-long worship in any simple article of human craftsmanship. To a meditative spirit what legendary rumours come to the mind with the sight of a derelict plough, brown with rust, at a field's edge; with the sight of a milking-stool; with the sight of an oar used as a fence-pole near a sea-side stile; with the sight of a king's crown! Merely to see a lambing crib for holding hay in a pasture startles the imagination to wakefulness.

In Africa I used to watch little forest monkeys

capering in the trees, and baboons pulling up roots on the open veldt; and yet between the little sad tree-monkeys with their squeezed-up faces, between the baboons with their snoutish phizogs, and the classical bust of Epicurus at the top of my staircase, what a wide separation! Because man has won the freedom of deceptive thought, because he can store knowledge on a shelf as mason bees store honey in their golden galleries he need not betray his dignity by the indulgence of self-vaunting claims. We should never allow our attention to be diverted from the earth and the affairs of the earth. The rumours of far kingdoms, 'not here, not here, my child', where the spirits of the dead are said to dwell for ever, distract men and prevent them from seeing life as it is, prevent them from concentrating their undivided attention upon policies of earthly civility and pleasance.

**I**N SO FAR AS THE SENSES SHOW US A STATE OF BECOMING, of transiency, and of change, they do not lie. But in declaring that Being was an empty illusion, Heraclitus will remain eternally right. The "apparent" world is the only world: the "true" world is no more than a false adjunct thereto. . . . Our scientific triumphs at the present day extend precisely so far as we have accepted the evidence of our senses.' Thus

writes the most inspired philosopher of our age.

It is a cat-and-dog quarrel that can have no end. Science at every point challenges and annuls sacrosanct authority. A mystical theological interpretation of life is either true or it is false. If it is false it is mere cozenage to differentiate between the extravagant superstitions of Rome and the more elusive superstitions of the Protestant churches. We grow impatient with these hedging reservations. It were better to sweep the floor clean and stand upon the bare stone flags.

Make no doubt of it, we have no permanent commerce with the creative force that lies at the core of matter, be it a quick wicked clay-pit worm or a demi-urge hid in the cloud rack of the heavens.

Our kingdom is the kingdom of this earth and we hold it silliness to keep looking up like so many Johnnys-heads-in-air. The sod has been, and always will be, our only copy-hold. These fanciful presumptions do nothing but harm. What we can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste, should content us. Let us learn to gather sloes in their season, to shear sheep, to draw water from the spring with grateful happiness, and no longer vex our hearts with impossible longings.

In this physical world, and it is from this common-sense physical world that we are alone justified in drawing our deductions, impermanence is the

supreme and tragic attribute of everything that is rare and lovely. The beatific vision is with us, and a moment later it has gone. Iseult in her sad forests: where is she now? The glory of numberless dawns has been utterly lost; moonlight midnights in dim English woods, gone; starlit spaces under cold sea-cliffs, visible no longer. The haughty pride of the bearded unicorn is broken at last; the lesser white-throat, for all her shy reserves, late or soon is removed utterly from her leafy retreats; the poppy in the garden, the camomile by the wayside, prosper but for a moment.

In Winfrith churchyard there is a gravestone put up in memory of a young woman who died at the end of the eighteenth century. There is a carving at the top of the stone representing her with a skull in her hand. In the sculpture's rude picture much is revealed. No sooner did man acquire consciousness than he was brought up in short order by the fact of death. He has scarce recovered from that first shock. From generation to generation man's purpose has been to mitigate the dread of his predicament. No pains have been too much for the devising of sophistries. The priestly trade derives directly from this subjective resistance. It would be impossible to exaggerate how obstinately men baulk at the prospect of annihilation. This girl with the skull in her hand suggests the root-problem

of human life. Animals come and go, but have no prevision of their ends. The cropping ewe marks not the bones of the ram that tupped her in the dog-days of July. To a man a churchyard skull speaks plain speech. Its argument is convincing and ugly, so ugly that this unacknowledged universal conspiracy has arisen to 'put it aside'.

It is far better to accept life simply and naturally; to recognize that soon enough our happiness will be at an end. There is no wiser word than to eat and to drink and to be merry. No word that we hear spoken, no gesture we see should be lost. In moments of profane love we should be possessed by an ultimate rapture, our spirits under their foolish bewitchment, awake with gladness, knowing the high fortune of so tender, so savage, so God-like an experience! The simplest actions should be undertaken with a full realization of their significance, as uncommon opportunities of natural piety never to come again. To pour out water from a jug, to break bread, to open a bottle of wine, are lordly offices. To observe suddenly the ancient face of our nurse, like the face of Polycarp, radiant, illuminated with goodness, on the threshold of our door, is a revelation more real, more moving than any fabled theophany of Emmaus or Damascus. No occasion of our lives but should have its solace. It were wise for a man to spend long hours upon his

knees weeding a parcel of ground or smelling the mould. We should even go to our garden jakes in a spirit of gratitude that we still can perform this just function of nature. We should not so much as rest in the open country without a prayer in our heart, a godless prayer sent out upon its crooked way for the rich guerdon of simply being alive.

For at the end of all—what are we? A herd of dream cattle, images of breath, passing shadows that move swiftly across the world's pastures to a graveyard where, at a single clap, eternity is as a day and a day as eternity.













